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ABSTRACT

An overview of mainstreaming in various nations is presented in this paper. Following a discussion of the background of mainstreaming, the paper offers brief analyses of mainstreaming trends in the United States; the Nordic countries; the nine Common Market nations; and the socialist countries, specifically the Soviet Union. The paper concludes that mainstreaming is a world-wide phenomenon, that no nation has devised the ultimate plan for mainstreaming, that the key to successful mainstreaming is the regular classroom teacher, and that it is time for educators in the United States to implement the provisions of Public Law 94-142, written to integrate exceptional individuals. (FL)

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MAINSTREAMING ACROSS NATIONS

Philip A. Hansen
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Various nations across the world have established the inalienable right of exceptional individuals to a full education which shall be, insofar as possible, free of restrictions which might prevent handicapped students from interaction with and participation in the same socio-cultural environment as that of non-handicapped students. For the professional discipline of education, mainstreaming is no longer a matter of philosophical speculation, it is a reality (1,2).

Background

Residing on our planet are 400 million mentally and physically handicapped persons. Twenty-five percent of these exceptional persons are citizens of developed nations. The vast majority, seventy-five percent, live in developing countries. More than 130 nations are providing, within the limits of their resources, programs for handicapped persons. In the more affluent nations programs may be quite sophisticated, in impoverished nations programs may be minimal at best (3). Growth of special education has been a slow and gradual process which occurred during the last 400 years. In the latter part of the 16th century, programs for deaf and blind children were instituted in Spain*. By the 18th century classes for the mentally retarded could be found in several nations, and mid-way through the 19th century special education classes were becoming a part of the regular school (4).

The growth of special education, however, has oft-times been socially painful. Not all cultures in the Western World have

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* Historians credit the abundant flow of gold from the New World which bolstered up the Spanish economy and provided financial resources for such efforts in special education.

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exhibited traditions of care and concern for the deviant in society. Thus, in the absence of altruism, special education has had to prove its viability, usually in the economic arena. As a consequence, the general nature of special education has tended to become restrictive, emphasizing vocational rehabilitation in deference to other personal and social goals (5, 6, 7, 8).

Until recently, special education programs have been characterized by relatively small instructional groups, differentiated according to constituent students who had received a common medical or psychological diagnostic classification and who were segregated from regular classes for instruction. The training of teachers of these classes of exceptional students ranged from zero (no more training than that of the regular classroom teacher) to perhaps one academic year of specialized training. Education of exceptional students conducted in special classes segregated from ordinary schooling has been, according to Krupski (9), "...at worst, detrimental to mildly handicapped youngsters and, at best, not demonstrably helpful (p. 1)". Evidence as to benefit or harm to severely handicapped students is less certain, although few studies have addressed themselves to that question.

After receiving a restricted or segregated schooling, everywhere exceptional individuals and their advocates are seeking improved educational conditions. Many nations are responding to the challenge, seeking to reduce the distinction made between regular education and the education of exceptional pupils. Rapid evolution of the movement for educational integration of the handicapped is coming at a time when competition is keen among vested interest groups for dwindling resources. Educators and allied professionals are bewildered. Solutions to this multitude of problems will take time, money and ingenuity, three precious commodities which are in short supply as the press for mainstreaming reaches crisis proportions.

Some Approaches to Mainstreaming

Educators in nations variously labeled Eastern or Western, capitalist or socialist, developed or developing are striving to integrate the handicapped into the mainstream of regular schooling. Their approaches vary, perhaps as a consequence of national law, perhaps as a consequence of context level of the culture

Trends in the U.S.A. In the United States, integration of the handicapped has been mandated by The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (10). This significant social legislation stipulates broad services to exceptional individuals through a complex delivery system.

A popular strategy for integrating the handicapped has been the resource room. This facility provides an in-school agency to advocate and educate the exceptional pupil. Existence of resource rooms prior to The Education for All Handicapped Children Act together with the comprehensive requirements of this legislation tended to legitimize the resource room as the strategy of choice for implementing mainstreaming. In the resource room, which is under the direction of a trained resource specialist, exceptional pupils receive on-site educational assessment. Diagnostic findings, for example, may indicate return to the regular classroom with special aids and materials, short-term remediation within the resource room and/or assignment to the nearest off-site specialized setting. In all instances, the concern of the resource specialist is for the least restrictive placement and the earliest appropriate return of the handicapped learner to the regular classroom environment.

Trends in the Nordic Nations. Since 1969 the nation of Denmark has worked methodically to achieve a coherent system of regular and special education. According to Jørgensen (11), "The aim

of special education is to enable pupils as far as possible to resume participation in ordinary forms of education according to the curriculum (p. 13)".

To reduce the potential isolation and segregation effects of placement in special class or special school, the Danish Ministry of Education, Special Education Section has developed a plan which features educational pairings of classes and schools (12). In this scheme, a special class is paired architecturally with an ordinary class. The regular teacher and special teacher share responsibilities for each other's class and for each other's students. Special students may flow easily into the regular class at varying times for appropriate lessons. Regular students may assist in the special classroom. Administration is required "to ensure the greatest possible interaction between the pupils and teachers in the special classes and those in the ordinary school (p. 1)", thus expanding the social environment.

In a variation of the scheme to pair regular and special classrooms, Denmark now requires the pairing of ordinary and special schools, a concept referred to as the "twin school principle (p. 2)". This plan requires each special school to be attached to an ordinary school through the sharing of common facilities. While specific forms of interaction between school personnel, both pupil and professional, are not mandated, it is expected such pairing may create an extended educational environment which will result in exchanges similar to those of the paired class program.

Like her sister nation to the south, during the last decade Norway has sought to lessen the disparity between regular and special education. To achieve an integration of the handicapped, Norway is allocating her resources along two fronts: (1) to enlarge the number of trained special education specialists within the system of ordinary schools, and (2) to provide every

teacher of regular classes basic training in the education and psychology of exceptional children in order that these teachers be better able to effect mainstreaming (13).

Keystone to this approach is an highly qualified consultant teacher (ct). The ct is the exceptional child's advocate, the facilitator of mainstreaming and the bridge between regular and special schooling. Consultant teachers are based in either regular schools or special schools and work in conjunction with multidisciplinary assessment teams which are assigned to a school or schools. When based in the regular school setting, the ct provides psychoeducational services to keep each exceptional child in her/his case load integrated into the milieu of the ordinary school. When based in a special school setting, the ct provides socio and psychoeducational services to place mainstreamable exceptional children into the milieu of the ordinary school together with follow-up services to keep them there.

In Sweden only the severely handicapped receive their education in special schools. For nearly two decades, moderately and mildly handicapped pupils have been integrated into the regular school program. Aside from the most seriously involved student, Swedish schools are concerned with maximizing integration of the handicapped by establishing optimum ratios between the greatest amount of time in mixed ability settings and the least amount of necessary special support services. Swedish educators simply assume children can have special needs which, in turn, may be transient or chronic and such children are entitled to expert supplementary support services from both the school system and society in general (14).

The training of regular classroom teachers emphasizes their full-service role with respect to all pupils, especially exceptional children. This training includes particular competence

in team teaching situations to enable the regular teacher to incorporate the contributions of various support personnel such as special education specialists, physicians, social workers, psychologists, together with a wide range of community services which, by social policy, must be coordinated with school systems.

Mainstreaming in the Nordic countries presents an approach to integration of the handicapped which is relatively free of a maze of bureaucratic steps and test of accountability. It exhibits extraordinary confidence in the candor of professional educators to rise to the challenge proposed by mainstreaming.

Trends in the European Economic Community. The nine nations which comprise the Common Market (EEC) are steadfast in their efforts to achieve integration of the handicapped into regular school programs. In the EEC, special education frequently suffers from out-of-the-money finishes in the race for funding. Priorities for allocation of monies in member nations tends to be disparate. Nonetheless, all participating countries have stipulated the right of the handicapped to a special education which will allow each exceptional person to reach her/his fullest potential. In addition, special education for the handicapped is viewed as a multidisciplinary problem which requires the attention of specialists in many professional sectors.

At a recent meeting in Rome (15), representatives of special education in the EEC were in harmony with respect to certain principles regarding the concept of mainstreaming. Among the ideas which received the sympathetic understanding of delegates were:

1. The education of exceptional persons is a responsibility of the nation's system for regular schooling.
2. Special education procedures should be made available to the system of regular schooling including that for early childhood education.
3. Preservice and inservice training should be made available to professionals who will operationalize mainstreaming.

4. Follow-up procedures should be established to assure equity for the handicapped in the world of work.

The EEC, through representatives of member states, has affirmed that the handicapped be accorded the fullest possible participation in the milieu of the total culture as reflected in the schools.

Trends in Socialist Countries. When viewed from the perspective of those nations oft referred to as the Eastern Block, the concept of integration of the handicapped is difficult for the Western observer to discern. These nations have tended to apply principles and programs utilized by the U.S.S.R, which is held to be the first nation to establish a socialist society. In terms of special education, exceptional individuals usually receive their schooling in separate institutions (often residential) which are organized around a particular diagnostic category -- or defect. Thus, those diagnosed as mentally retarded will attend special institutes for the mentally retarded; the blind, special institutes for the blind; the deaf, special institutes for the deaf, etc. This is not, however, seen as segregation. It must be remembered that in a socialist country the society is seen as integrated. Each person and each structure under which persons may be organized in a socialist nation has a common purpose - a common goal. They are to be non-competitive and without class distinction. The existence of special institutes or separate schools for exceptional individuals is in no way believed to disintegrative or segregated. Each handicapped pupil, each special school is held to be a part of the collective wholeness and oneness of the society. In fact, the concept of mainstreaming is seen to be contrary to socialist thinking and a plan which would tend to place vulnerable children in situations of personal and social failure.

In furtherance of this ideology, several nations are seeking to improve delivery aspects of their programs for handicapped persons. The concern is for efficacy of services. The integration sought is at the level of services; a desire to provide improved and more

extensive specialized services through agency coordination.

In commenting on a tendency for equal treatment of unequal persons, Hulek (16) stated:

> These tendencies, however, encounter a number of obstacles, especially with regard to traditional divisions of professional responsibility and competence, which in turn have conditioned the structure and modes of operation of the institutions involved in such problems. There is, in the first place, a lack of coordination and pooling of efforts within the area of rehabilitation services as such; for instance, between the professions and institutions offering services for the medical, social or vocational rehabilitation of the disabled on the one hand and special education on the other. The reason of this is to be sought in insufficient recognition of the fact that these various functions are joint instruments for the common goal of helping the disabled to become independent and autonomous members of society (p. 160).

Thus, the approach of Socialist Nations is to further the integration of the handicapped through realignment of the agencies providing necessary professional assistance. It is believed that better orchestration of these professional spheres will more effectively accomplish the goals inherent to socialist philosophy.

Conclusions

In sum, four conclusions seem tenable:

1. Integration of the handicapped, mainstreaming, is a world-wide phenomenon. It has evolved naturally and has been no surprise to those sensitive to social forces which have, over time, helped shape the human condition.
2. No nation has yet devised the ultimate plan for mainstreaming. The world community has much to learn from each other.
3. Across nations, the key to successful integration of the handicapped is the regular classroom teacher. In the regular classroom of the past, the exceptional pupil was either denied admittance or exiled to a segregated schooling. Laws can bring her/him back into the regular classroom. Something more will be needed to help her/him touch the heart and soul of every educator.
4. P.L. 94-142 is likely the most elegant and certainly the most lengthy legislation which has been written to

integrate exceptional individuals. Its verbal intemperance may be its greatest handicap. A law designed to up-grade human rights for exceptional persons in education, it is so weighted down with incidental activities, ancillary requirements, accountability mechanisms, system controls, instructional minutae and other specifics that it may well undershoot its target. The law exists. Its heart is in the right place. It is a time for educators, fellow professionals and the handicapped to join together and implement an orderly change process.

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